EL DORADO COUNTY
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
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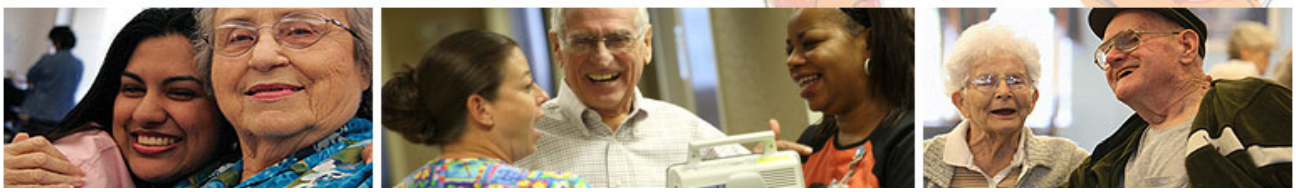
Selecting a Long-Term Care Facility

Protecting, Advocating & Promoting Residents' Rights



The following information is reprinted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services except where otherwise noted.

At some point in your life, you may need to select a care facility either for yourself or, more likely, for someone you love. It may be that the need for full-time care is brief following a hospitalization or injury. Or, the need may be long-term as your loved one may no longer be able to care for himself/herself as the result of dementia, other debilitating illness, or injury. The process of selecting a short/long-term care facility can be a difficult one. Often the decision needs to be made quickly and occurs within the context of strong emotions such as guilt, fear, and doubt. Therefore, the tips provided below may serve to focus one's thoughts and enable the best decision to be made for all involved.

General Guidelines

LIST SEVERAL PLACES: Organize a list of homes to inquire about and visit. It may be wise to place your name on as many waiting lists as you can as early as possible. Being on a waiting list does not obligate you to move into that particular home, but this advance planning will give you more options when the final decision is being made.

KNOW YOUR NEEDS: You or your loved one may require some special health services: physical, occupational or speech therapy; oxygen, IV therapy or tube feeding; Alzheimer. If you need such services, find out if the home you're looking at provides them--not all homes do. Other issues to consider are the home's location, size and payment method accepted. **Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE):** Private Pay, Long-Term Care Policies (may have elimination period). **Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF):** Private Pay, Medi-Care (limited # days), Medi-Cal, Long-Term Policies (may have elimination period).

PLAN TO VISIT: Plan to visit several homes. This is one of the most important steps in the process; it gives you an opportunity to do some "comparison shopping."

Check with the home for scheduled tours and then make an appointment with the social worker and/or staff who handle admissions. If you wish, return at a later time for an unannounced visit.

General Guidelines (Continued)

During your visit, **USE YOUR FIVE SENSES** and let your senses guide you. Trust your instincts. It is OK to do this. If something doesn't feel right to you, it probably isn't. Your senses can help you question such things as:

- Are there unpleasant odors?
- Are the residents well-groomed, dressed and out of bed?
- Is the noise level unusual?
- Does the facility look clean?
- Is staff visible? Friendly?
- Are residents involved in activities?
- Does the home "feel" warm, or impersonal?

When you visit a home, you should carry this checklist with you. It will help you to compare one home with another, but remember to compare homes certified in the same category, for example, a RCFE with another RCFE and a SNF with another SNF. Because homes may be licensed in more than one category, always compare similar types of service among facilities.

Look at Daily Life

- Do residents seem to enjoy being with staff?
- Are most residents dressed for the season and time of day?
- Does staff know the residents by name?
- Does staff respond quickly to resident calls for assistance?
- Are activities tailored to residents' individual needs and interests?
- Are residents involved in a variety of activities?
- Does the home serve food attractively?
- Does the home consider personal food likes and dislikes in planning meals?
- Does the home use care in selecting roommates?
- Does the nursing home have a resident's council? If it does, does the council influence decisions about resident life?
- Does the nursing home have a family council? If it does, does the council influence decisions about resident life?
- Does the facility have contact with community groups, such as pet therapy programs and Scouts?

Look at the Care Residents Receive

- Do various staff and professional experts participate in evaluating each resident's needs and interests?
- Does the resident's family participate in developing the resident's care plan?
- Does the home provide rehabilitation programs, such as physical, occupational, speech and language therapies?
- Does the home have any special services that meet your needs? For example, special care units for residents with dementia?
- What is the facility's policy on use of physical/chemical restraints?
- What levels of nursing staff provide care?
- What is the facility's policy on adherence to advanced directives?

Look at the Care Family Caregivers Receive

- Are there programs for family members?
- Are the social service and nursing staff responsive to family members' questions, concerns and needs?
- Would you feel respected by this staff?
- Would you feel like a partner in care with this staff?

Look at How the Home Handles Payment

- Is the facility certified for Medicare?
- Is the facility certified for Medi-Cal Assistance?
- Is the resident or the resident's family informed when charges are increased?

Look at the Environment

- Is the outside of the home clean and in good repair?
- Are there outdoor areas accessible for residents to use?
- Is the inside of the nursing home clean and in good repair?
- Does the nursing home have handrails in appropriate locations and grab bars in bathrooms?
- When floors are being cleaned, are warning signs displayed, or are areas blocked off to prevent accidents?
- Is the home free from unpleasant odors?
- Are toilets convenient to bedrooms/or other locations?
- Do noise levels fit the activities that are going on
- Is it easy for residents in wheelchairs to move around the home?
- Is the lighting appropriate for what residents are doing?
- Are there private areas for residents to visit with family, visitors, or physicians?
- Are residents' bedrooms furnished in a pleasant manner?
- Do the residents have some personal items in their bedrooms (for example, family pictures, souvenirs, a chair)?
- Do the residents' rooms have accessible storage areas for residents' personal items?

Other Things to Note

- Does the nursing home have a good reputation in the community?
- Is there a specific affiliation?
- Does the nursing home have a list of references?
- Is the nursing home convenient for family or friends to visit?
- Do you have questions or concerns? If so, call the local or state Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.
- Does your family member's physician have a relationship with this facility?

Contacting Your Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Ombudsmen are trained to advocate and resolve problems for residents of Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF), and Residential Care Facility for the Elderly (RCFE). If you want, the ombudsman can assist you with complaints. However, unless you give the ombudsman permission to share your concerns, these matters are kept confidential. If complaints or problems that are brought to the ombudsman's attention should be investigated by a unit of government, the ombudsman will work with you to assure that the appropriate agency is notified.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program can be reached by calling 530-621-6271 or the STATEWIDE OMBUDSMAN TOLL FREE 24-HOUR HOTLINE at: 1-800-231-4024.

Under the federal Older Americans Act, every state is required to have an Ombudsman Program that addresses complaints and advocates for improvements in the long-term care system.